

Education Governance Responses
Enosburg Falls Meeting (1/24/07) – Enosburg Falls Middle/High School

25 Attendees (facilitated by Robin Scheu, aided by Jill Remick and Susan Hayes)

Question #1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?

Advantages

More local control
Similar educational goal/curriculum
SU board doesn't have to deal w/day-to-day issues
Local control, ie, hiring of principal & teachers
This system brings in community involvement, ie. 1460 plus community members on boards
Local community budget control
Superintendent's full attention at board meetings
Local knowledge of local issues
Voters support for local school (ownership)
More local control of programs
Local representation (close relationship between board & community – board is not politicized)
Town identity is tied to schools

Disadvantages

SU budget not voted on directly
Separate teacher negotiations
Multiple lines of reporting for superintendents
Superintendents stretched thin
Disjointed curriculum
Different contracts, policy, salary, etc.
Superintendent has a lot of meetings
MVU has no school choice, ie., Franklin
Reality is it would create union schools – we don't want one
(We only came up with two because we have a good system).
It takes longer to affect change
Have to sit on multiple boards

Question #2: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?

Advantages

Streamlining governance
More support w/decisions
Consolidation of contracts
Uniform development of schools & programs
Facility flexibility & staff flexibility
Board members not stretched as thin
Superintendents report to one board

Teacher negotiations by larger groups
No supervisory union budget
Superintendents – Period
Children whose schools fail their standards would have more flexibility

Disadvantages

Less discretion w/ decisions
Lose local voice
Too much work/too little time
Diminished local control
Parent resistance due to loss of community
Less familiar w/each individual school
Under proposed plan there is a financial incentive to move students between towns or even close schools
Weighted voting can lead to:

- Small towns w/ few votes may not be able to find school board reps (no power)
- Districts w/ one large town could have one member w/a majority of votes
- In districts w/one at-large board member, that member has 50% of the votes

Boards hire superintendents and teachers, but not principals
Increased governance = increased frustration for citizen communicating/initiating change
Less community involvement – persons involved at board level
Lose voice particularly @budget – w/voice votes on floor. Geographically would have Australian Ballot = less information as to why a budget passes/fails

Debrief Comments:

Common support for local control
Importance of town identity
Nobody seems “hot” for the new plan
Lack of connection between organizational/governance change and education quality
Concern about unfunded mandates
Sees proposed changes as superficial/disconnected to real ed. issues
Real \$ issues are: special ed., teacher benefits, and teacher salaries - remove the burden of these issues from the local communities
Real issue: reducing education costs
Move bureaucratic issues away from local communities – leave them w/programmatic issues
VT does better than a lot of states re: educating our kids – student population has remained stable – so why are we changing?
Comparison between school board member numbers and legislators is misguided – better comparison is selectboard.
Question about process – what next?
Important to note that not all participants are familiar w/governance – state survey needs to reflect this (add question on survey that probes awareness/knowledge)